New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1951

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Long Days"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

April 21, 1951

'Long Days' Tale Of an Obsession

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Drama.
Topic—Motherhood.
Theme—Domination.
I find it—Weak.

Since so many of the people behind the scenes of "The Long Days" are new to the local theater, it would be nice to welcome them with encouragement. Unfortunately their product is pretty ordinary.

There is nothing new about dramatizing bossy mothers. This latest try has no fresh twists. It is told with repeated flashbacks, in a confused atmosphere.

The mistress of the farm in "The Long Days" is fanatically proud that eight generations of her family have lived on the same spot. She would sacrifice the happiness of her sons and their wives and children to perpetuate the tradition.

Prefers Asylum.

One son has married "beneath him." Mother has managed to ship his wife off to an asylum, and it developes that the wife prefers it to life on Mother's farm.

Another son is in jail during the course of the play. A third has made quite a life for himself as a lawyer in California, and Mother is determined to get him back on the farm despite his wife's horror at the suggestion.

In the end, the crazed daughter-in-law comes home, and the Mother mistakenly shoots the one son who has stayed there to work. Whereupon Mother goes insane.

Earnest Intention.

There is undoubtedly an earnest intention behind all this, but it has neither shape nor direction. The characters constantly change attitudes, moods and motives in mid-sentence.

What with the constant blackouts and flashbacks, and the talky nature of the play, the cast seems to race desperately against time and lines. The set showing two rooms of the farmhouse and much of the surrounding country is an interesting idea which does not come off. It frequently leaves characters calling each other up a flight of stairs to which there is plainly no top.

Frances Starr plays the leading role. Since it follows no clear pattern of mistaken intentions or evil, she has to act it in a straightforward manner. Only a remarkably experienced and deft lady of the theater could keep up with the endless lines and transitions of the part.

Audience Controlled.

When she finally has something to bite into, as the bravura second-act speech, or the mad scene at the end, Miss Starr has the audience completely in her control.

In an evening of aberration, Katharine Bard's scene as the unbalanced daughter-in-law, when she explains why she preferred the asylum to life on the farm, is the most real and moving moment. Actually there is not a great deal of point in the contrast explained by the lines. But Miss Bard plays the scene with such honesty that it seems most convincing.

Jeffrey Lynn is the defeated son who stays home to work the family land. It is a part without much variation, and Lynn plays it with simple sincerity.

"THE LONG DAYS"

Play by Davis Snow; staged by Edward Ludlum; settings by Eldon Elder; costumes by Ruth Morley; presented by Tait-Buell at the Empire Theatre, April 20, 1951. The cast:

Ann Adams.....Neva Patterson
Charles Adams....John O'Hare
Joe Adams.....Jeffrey Lynn
Marian Adams...Frances Starr
Sylvia Adams..Linda Mae Strota
Frances Adams...Susan Harris
Mary Adams....Gale Ashworth
Samuel Adams..Ralph Theadore
Paula Adams...Katharine Bard

Synopsis: Act I. Kitchen of the Adams' New England farmhouse. Early October of the present time, late afternoon. Act II. The same. About midnight. Act III. The same. About 3 p.m. of the following day.

DAILY NEWS

April 21, 1951

'The Long Days' a Grim Little Play Concerning a Yankee Matriarch

By JOHN CHAPMAN

A matriarch is a grim party to run into anywhere. She is at her most gruesome when she is encountered as a character in a play, being the only two-legged animal which eats its young. And when — as happened to Frances Starr last evening at the Empire Theatre — the matriarch is an eighth-generation New Englander, the events in her life are dire to an extreme.

Miss Starr has returned to the stage in a drama by Davis Snow titled "The Long Days." It is a play which takes itself very seriously and which is quite nicely presented, and in it some indication that Mr. Snow might one day write a pretty good play. But it is not a particularly happy situation for Miss Starr, Jeffrey Lynn, Katharine Bard, John O'Hare, Ralph Theadore and Neva Patterson to be found in—for these actors are generally better than their material.

Nobody Has Any Fun.

Eighth in the line of a Yankee family named Adams, Miss Starr clings to the tribal farm and dominates a husband, three sons and a daughter-in-law. She has dominated so cheerfully, being the unselfish, hard-working type of matriarch, that, at the time Mr. Snow's play occurs, one son is in jail as a drunk, another son is drunk and would like to be in jail, a third son has run away from home; a daughter-in-law has been committed to an asylum and her husband has succumbed to a secret vice of playing the New York stock market quite successfully.

"The Long Days" is played in a well-imagined setting designed by Eldon Elder, in which quickly accomplished flashbacks explain why everybody has grown to hate Life with Mother so. Once in a while Mr. Snow achieves some clear and effective writing, but most of the time he allows his characters to talk too long at a time. His best scene—and the best played scene—is one in which Miss Bard, the supposedly demented daughter-in-law, returns from the asylum to her decent and loving husband, Mr. Lynn. Miss Bard acts these moments very well.

I'm afraid Miss Starr's assignment is a thankless one. I like her and don't think she was cut out to be a matriarch. The author has been too severe with her. And with me, for that matter.

The New York Times

April 21, 1951

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

On the basis of the material that is in it, "The Long Days," which opened at the Empire last evening, ought to be a good deal more effective than it is. For Davis Snow is writing a bleak and bitter New England saga not unlike plays and novels that other writers have transmuted into literature. Why are "Ethan Frome" and "Desire Under the Elms" so vivid and furious, and why is "The Long Days" so detached and remote? It is not enough to reply that Edith Wharton and Eugene O'Neill are artists, for that begs the question. What is an artist and what is an ordinary writer?

* * *

Mr. Snow has put together the story of a dominating New England mother who wrecks the lives of her family for what appear to be the worthiest of reasons. Her principles and her moral strength have driven one son from home, two sons to drink and one daughter-in-law into a mental institution. Her ancestors and her farm have set rigid standards to which she makes everyone conform. But her love is really a ruthless tyranny that destroys everything she stands for.

In the end it develops that she is insane; and that, to be frank, is no conclusion at all. It reduces everything Mr. Snow has been writing to the level of a pathological sensation drama. That is not the reason why "The Long Days" is such a commonplace piece of work. But the fact that Mr. Snow is content with so trivial a conclusion indicates that he is no artist. No artist would waste so much valid material on a clinical denouement. Nothing is solved by saying that a person is insane. All that matters is the reason. A genuine artist would be absorbed in discovering and dramatizing the reasons.

* * *

Although Frances Starr portrays the part of the mother with life and lucidity, and although the cast includes other able actors, the performance lacks warmth and fluidity. Again, on the basis of the talents of the players, you wonder why the drama never really comes to life. Jeffrey Lynn's discontented young farmer, Neva Patterson's urbane wife from the West, John O'Hare's young attorney and Ralph Theadore's aging farmer and husband—are all interesting characters. As the central character, Miss Starr runs through the performance like quicksilver—bright and animated.

No doubt Edward Ludlum's fussy direction is partly responsible for the contrived impression the performance gives. Although Eldon Elder's setting is handsome and ingenious, it, too, has a manufactured appearance. But the quality of Mr. Snow's play is the source of all the other troubles. It looks and sounds plausible, but there is no art in it. It is more like a thesis in dramatic arts than a professional drama.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

April 21, 1951

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY Jr.

A Crop of Attitudes

THE possessive mother twisting her children's lives to suit her own values is once again the subject of a stage study in "The Long Days" at the Empire. In this case the New England parent, played by Frances Starr, is no more than mildly formidable, and the play a wordy, shallow and inconclusive piece of work. All the proper, even conventional characters for this sort of drama are present in the David Snow script, and they are placed in opposition when a wandering son comes home and stirs things up. Two or three good scenes are generated out of all the resentments, but on the whole this is a rather clumsy action on a family battleground that is almost too typical to be real.

* * *

Snow's set of characters living in or near a spreading and prosperous New England farmhouse includes the domineering mother obsessed with her duty to keep the place up for one more of numerous generations; a father who is totally under her thumb but playing the stock market on the sly; a son and his terrified wife, both hopelessly enmeshed in the family net, and another son and his bright, intuitive wife from California who come for a visit and upset this applecart, exposing the rotten ones under the rosy top layer. The script takes the form of present conflicts combined with flashbacks to old quarrels, and these people confront each other in an almost geometrical pattern of attitudes. Everything that happens in this play is inevitable except an ending which avoids a decisive battle of wills in a trumped-up incident of melodrama. The evil caused by the mother's proud, selfish nature is clear but not vivid, and the long conversations are sometimes interesting but rarely of more than nominal dramatic power.

* * *

The director, Edward Ludlum, has understood that the menace must be kept out of sight behind a mask of underplaying, but he has had some difficulty moving his players around a divided farmhouse set that looks handsome but seems to restrict a natural flow of action. Miss Starr as a white-haired lady half-unconscious of her own wickedness; Neva Patterson as a courageous wife who sees behind the facade of New England decorum, and Jeffrey Lynn as the farming son lost in the maze of his mother's wiles are the most competent members of a cast which turns in some ungainly acting in several places. The theme of "The Long Days" is sound but undeveloped. Its stereotyped object lesson has a certain mechanical suspense, but the details are not substantial or subtle enough to fill up its outline with drama.

Journal American

April 21, 1951

And a Long Night, Too

By JOHN McCLAIN

Last night Frances Starr, a fine actress, abetted by Jeffrey Lynn, opened in something called "The Long Days" at the Empire Theatre.

There is no need to sell the talents of Miss Starr and I think Mr. Lynn is a capable and engaging actor. I do not believe, however, that they are laboring in a happy arbor.

It is the story of a matriarch, Miss Starr being same. She has this incredible determination to preserve her homestead against the inroads of a son who lives with her and another who returns and thus motivates the play.

This son bobs up with his wife and almost immediately we are aware that the mother is going to foist upon him the fate that has befallen (a) his brother and (b) his father.

Crime Doesn't Pay

The old lady is going to keep the premises running—or else. It is not important that she has committed the wife of the resident son to a laughing academy, or that she has endeavored to turn his own child against him.

Of course the whole thing catches up with everybody in the end. One of the principals is shot. I'm not going to tell you which one it is, but I think I may be pardoned for saying that the circumstances are about the most plausible I've seen.

There is this fellow, recently riddled, and nobody pays the slightest attention to him. They don't even find out if he's dead. Nobody thinks of sending for a doctor or the cops. They are much more concerned with the emotions of the character who pulled the trigger. Well, maybe that's life—or death.

* * *

Lynn's Okay

Frances Starr was immensely efficient in the big part of the matriarch, and I thought Jeffrey Lynn more than justified his billing in the other stellar role.

I liked Neva Patterson, as Mrs. Charles Adams, although John O'Hare, however efficient, never quite made me believe he was part of this unfortunate family. I loved Ralph Theadore, as the father, and Katharine Bard, the wacky wife of the underprivileged brother.

But I'm sorry, I thought "The Long Days" also provided a rather long night.

Daily Mirror

April 21, 1951

'The Long Days' Adds Up To Longer Evening

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Davis Snow's "The Long Days," which reached the Empire Theatre last evening under the auspices of Tait-Buell, is somewhat reminiscent of "The Silver Cord." It has to do with a domineering mother who wrecks the lives of two of her sons when she tries to run them. A third and more venturesome one manages to escape in time.

In addition to trying to tie her boys to her apron strings, she also attempts to moor them to the family farm, which, incidentally, represents a strait-laced New England way of life. She even goes so far as to have one son's wife committed to an asylum, in order to obtain control of their children.

Marian Adams is certainly one of the most hateful women ever put upon a stage. Were she less obviously drawn, more subtle in her diabolic machinations, she might be more fascinating in her insane ruthlessness. As it is, she is merely distasteful and depressing.

There is some good writing in "The Long Days," but it is negated by Snow's use of repetitive flashbacks. They slow up the action and lessen the dramatic tensity. However, Edward Ludlum's resourceful direction and Eldon Elder's excellent setting help to offset these intrusions on the play's forward movement.

Tait-Buell has assembled a first-rate cast. Frances Starr, who will always be remembered for her performance in "The Easiest Way," makes Snow's Marian Adams as disagreeable as, and much more plausible than, Snow etched her. Jeffrey Lynn, who has spent too much time in Hollywood, acts one of her victimized sons with a simplicity and honesty that are genuinely moving.

Katharine Bard, a most capable young actress, gets all from the role of a hapless daughter-in-law that the author wrote into it. Neva Patterson, John O'Hare and Ralph Theadore do exceptionally well in other parts.

O'Hare, whom we called to the attention of talent scouts when he made his debut with the Erie (Pa.) Civic Playhouse, is a handsome young actor. We still think Arthur Willi, Joe Pincus, Al Altman and Harry Mayer would do well to put him before their testing cameras.

Frankly, "The Long Days" lends the illusion of a long and sometimes trying evening in the theatre, though it is rather brief as to actual running time. It has some moments of merit, but not sufficient.

New York Post

April 22, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

Gloomy New England Homecoming

Until it falls to pieces in an idiotic tragic ending, Davis Snow's "The Long Days," which opened at the Empire Friday night, gives intermittent signs that it might amount to something. Although it is almost always labored and overwrought, this bleak new drama about the ruthless domination of a New England farming family by a righteously selfish matriarch offers promising indications from time to time of theatrical power, intelligent observation of character, and a sensitive feeling for the countryside. But it all comes to nothing.

While the ending isn't entirely to blame, it certainly contributes heavily to the play's final collapse. In two scenes, the author heavily plants the fact that the disagreeable silver-cord mother is carrying a pistol, and there is never any doubt that eventually it is going to be used. Well, she gets around to shooting the more pleasant of her sons, whereupon there is a scene, in which the dead man is virtually ignored while the old girl goes laboriously mad and the surviving son runs wistfully after her, that sets a new high in fatuousness.

Driven to Drink

The mother, incidentally, easily wins the title of the season's most deplorable character, even though the playwright makes an effort to provide understanding for her. She drives people to drink, turns her sons into neurotic weaklings, treats her easy-going husband with biting contempt, drives one of her rebellious daughters-in-law into an insane asylum, and turns the poor woman's children against her. It is all because she insists on dominating her family and ruling the lives of her sons out of her overweening sense of clan pride.

One of the boys slaps her and runs away from home, but, when he comes back ten years later, the silver cord is exerting its pull on him as strongly as ever. The only person she encounters who stands up to her with any effectiveness is the young man's wife, the one who doesn't get sent to the insane asylum. The son who stays at home turns to sullen drinking and the good natured father retains his sanity by playing the stock market. Come to think of it, there is another son, who also drinks but apparently stays in jail.

Final Wreckage

All of this might seem to indicate that "The Long Days" was a pretty silly play, and to a hapless extent it is. The remarkable thing is that it is something more than that, too. There are, as I have said, flashes of force, moments of genuine feeling for the power the New England land exerts even on those who are bitterly resentful of its spell, and bits of effective character observation. The father, for example, is an entirely believable figure, and the murdered son is also convincingly depicted. But the clumsiness in the play finally wrecks it.

A good cast does everything possible with its assignments. The veteran Frances Starr succeeds in making the mother something more than a monster, until she is bogged down in the big mad scene. Neva Patterson adds to the number of her good performances as the rebellious wife, and Katherine Bard is touching and real as the girl driven to near-madness. Ralph Theadore is, as usual, excellent as the father, and Jeffrey Lynn does remarkably well as the victimized son. John O'Hare has his troubles with the role of the son who flees. It is too bad that "The Long Days" turns out to be a botch.

"A Tree Grows in Brooklyn"

Daily Mirror
April 20, 1951

'Tree Grows in Brooklyn' Is Top-Notch Musical

By ROBERT COLEMAN

George Abbott and Betty Smith have done a marvelous job of translating Miss Smith's lengthy and complicated best-selling novel, "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn," into an amusing and often moving musical play. Many a librettist has come a cropper on similar and less taxing assignments.

The versatile Abbott—he also produced the new arrival in association with Robert Fryer—was fortunate indeed in persuading Dorothy Fields to do the lyrics and Arthur Schwartz to compose the score. In most musicals the plot is brought to an abrupt halt by the interpolation of songs. In this instance, the Fields-Schwartz numbers not only shine in their own right, but become vastly important in furthering the action and lending atmosphere to the many scenes.

Jo Mielziner and Irene Sharaff have collaborated on a gorgeous production. Their scenery and costumes realize beautifully the moods of this robust depiction of the seamier side of life, love and sacrifice in Brooklyn about the turn of the century. And Abbott, that amazing Jack-of-all-trades, has contributed perfect casting and flawless direction.

Shirley Booth is at her wonderful best as Cissy, who doesn't always ask for a marriage certificate with her "husbands," all called "Harry." Making her second venture into the song-and-dance field, Miss Booth not only acts but sings the role to the hilt. She had the first-nighters cheering.

Johnny Johnston, probably better known to you from records and films, is Johnny Nolan, the amiable, ineffectual, tippling singing waiter to the life. Marcia Van Dyke, a refugee from the first violin section of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, makes an auspicious Broadway debut as the pretty girl who marries Johnny, bears him a daughter and loyally puts up with his weaknesses. It would be a fine performance for even an experienced actress. It is nothing short of brilliant for a novice.

Nathaniel Frey as Cissy's last "Harry:" Dody Heath, as the brassy Hildy; Nomi Mitty as the studious Francie Nolan, and Ruth Amos as the mistress of the dubious house, are eminently right. Harland Dixon, who impersonates a rakish judge, must have thrilled to the acrobatic stepping of Lou Wills, Jr. For Dixon knows a dancer when he sees one, having been half of the famous team of Doyle and Dixon.

Herbert Ross has contributed helpful choreography. His expressionistic, eerie Halloween ballet stopped the show cold.

"A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" will be packing the Alvin Theatre for months to come. It is a salty, colorful, heart-warming salute to the nostalgic Nineties, which could be tragic as well as gay. It is another Abbott triumph. But take our tip and leave the kiddies home when you see it.

"A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN"

Musical comedy based on the novel by Betty Smith; music by Arthur Schwartz; book by Miss Smith and George Abbott; lyrics by Dorothy Fields; staged by Mr. Abbott; settings by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Irene Sharaff; choreography by Herbert Ross; presented by Mr. Abbott and Robert Fryer at the Alvin Theatre, April 19, 1951. The cast:

Willie	Billy Parsons
Petey	Lou Wills, Jr.
Allie	Joe Calvan
Hildy	Dody Heath
Katie	Marcia Van Dyke
Aloysius	Jordan Bentley
Johnny Nolan	Johnny Johnston
Cissy	Shirley Booth
Harry	Nathaniel Frey
Max	Bruno Wick
Mae	Ruth Amos
Moriarty	Roland Wood
Florence	Janet Parker
Edgie	Donald Duerr
Francie	Nomi Mitty
Junior	Howard Martin
Swanswine	Albert Linville
Hick	Alan Gilbert
Judge	Harland Dixon
Salesman	Art Carroll
Maudie	Celine Flanagan

DAILY NEWS
April 20, 1951

'Tree in Brooklyn' a Double Hit; It's Very Funny and Sentimental

By JOHN CHAPMAN

When George Abbott made it known several months ago that he, Betty Smith, Arthur Schwartz and Dorothy Fields were going to make a musical out of Miss Smith's novel, "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn," many people said, "I don't see how they can make a show out of that book." I couldn't take a stand one way or the other, because I haven't read the book. But today it all seems easy to me. All the quartet had to do was write the show and get a wonderful cast for it and open it at the Alvin last evening.

"A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" is a splendid musical—or two musicals. The first act is marvelously funny, with Shirley Booth giving the performance of her or almost any other comedienne's life. The second act is a very touching one as it completes the story of a Brooklyn Liliom who is a wonderful fellow even if he is a rumpot and a failure. There has been nothing on the music-show stage which tugs so strongly at the heartstrings as this act does since Evelyn Laye came over here in Noel Coward's "Bittersweet."

A Wonderful Quartet.

In fine turn-of-the-century settings by Jo Mielziner, "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" tells of several interesting characters, but mostly of four people. These are Miss Booth, a practical party who has lived with five men, all of whom she calls Harry; Nathaniel Frey, the fifth Harry, who is a man with a fascinating lack of intellect; Johnny Johnston, a young singer with a heart full of love and a stomach full of liquor, and Marcia Van Dyke, the sweet girl who marries Johnny and sticks with him through all his failures.

Shirley Booth is truly something. I suspect she can do anything in the theatre and do it better than anybody else can. It wouldn't surprise me if she signed at the Met a couple of years from now for the female lead in "Tristan and Isolde." Her business in "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" is to be funny, and she had me weeping with laughter. And in Nathaniel Frey she has the perfect foil.

I had quite a bit of eye trouble last evening. If it wasn't from laughing it was from being quite deeply moved by the performances of Mr. Johnston and Miss Van Dyke. Miss Van Dyke, who has never been in a show before, is a find—one of those discoveries George Abbott has the habit of making.

A Grand Score.

The Schwartz-Fields songs are grand. They include hilarious numbers like "Love Is the Reason" and "He Had Refinement" for Miss Booth; gentle and melodically elusive numbers like "I'll Buy You a Star" for Mr. Johnston, and solid hits like "Look Who's Dancing" and "Mine Till Monday."

Mr. Abbott's staging is masterful and all his players are just fine. The company includes Dody Heath, Lou Mills Jr., Nomi Mitty, Albert Linville and—a very pleasant surprise to me—Harland Dixon, who dances as of old.

I guess it's easy to make a musical out of a novel. All you have to do is know how.

The New York Times

April 20, 1951

'A Tree Grows in Brooklyn' Made Into an Affable Musical Drama

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Everything being exactly in order, "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" turns out to be one of those happy inspirations that the theatre dotes on. This is the musical that Betty Smith and George Abbott have made out of Miss Smith's fabulous novel. With the richest score Arthur Schwartz has written in years, it opened at the Alvin last evening to begin a long and affectionate career. It makes all the performers look their best and makes the audience feel thoroughly contented.

Certainly Shirley Booth does. If everything else about "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" were not so attractive, it might be regarded as her show. For she has never had a part so ideally suited to her style of warm, magnetic comedy, and she has never given a more glowing performance.

She plays the part of Cissy, the cheerful Brooklyn slattern who is so careless, though appreciative about men. It could be played for low comedy without violating the part. In fact, the scene in which Cissy simulates child-birth to get her man to accept an adopted child is about the most fantastic bit of horseplay the season has produced. But somehow Miss Booth translates all the hilarity of Cissy's career into an endearing folk characterization which is funny and lovable at the same time. To hear Miss Booth singing "Love Is the Reason" in a sort of comic fugue arrangement is to enjoy musical comedy in its best form.

* * *

Putting Miss Shirley in charge of Cissy's foibles does distort Miss Smith's novel perceptibly. But in the writing and in the fluid direction Miss Smith and Mr. Abbott have not forgotten her rueful tale of a Brooklyn marriage that did not turn out well, although Katie and Johnny never stopped loving each other and were devoted to their child. Irene Sharaff's costumes may be a little too grand for the Nolan situation, and so are Jo Mielziner's settings. But like everything else in this show, they derive from nostalgic sentiment for a neighborhood and its people.

Mr. Schwartz has a basic theme which he has developed with gusto and devotion, and Dorothy Fields has found idiomatic lyrics to express the comedy and the pensiveness of the music. Some of the songs are in the tradition of the old romantic melodies of the period—good-hearted and expansive in easy rhythms. But Mr. Schwartz has many moods this time; and he and Miss Fields have written everything from a Brooklyn jubilee like "That's How It Goes" to the rhapsodic "I'll Buy You a Star."

Mr. Abbott has cast the parts with his most perceptive taste. As Katie, the drudge who never stops dreaming, Marcia Van Dyke gives a gravely idyllic performance. Johnny Johnston, who has an excellent baritone voice, gives a nicely detailed performance as the weak though loyal husband and father. Nathaniel Frey, as the slow-witted but exuberant plumber; Dody Heath as the temperamental neighborhood snob; Nomi Mitty as the starry-spirited daughter—play with a sense of respect for the parts and relish for the show. Everyone in the cast is in the sunniest humor.

They have been hard put to find a place for the customary ballet in this tenement fable. Herbert Ross' set-piece in the second act just about holds the franchise. "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" is not primarily a dancing carnival. But what with the lively music and the feeling of a general good time it keeps its feet moving jauntily all evening; and Harland Dixon, who has not been around for years, contributes a few genial steps to a dreamy sequence on a Brooklyn roof-top in the summer.

In short, it is a darlin' show in a hospitable mood with a liking for its people and locale. People in Brooklyn ought to be proud of this pastoral to music on the sidewalks and in the rookeries.

New York Post

April 20, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

Brooklyn, Songs and Shirley Booth

Not having read "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" as a novel or seen it as a motion picture—a confession which, I suppose, makes me virtually an illiterate—I can't tell you whether the musical version of Betty Smith's fictional smash, which opened at the Alvin Theater last night, is a faithful reflection of the original. But I do know that some talented theatrical people have turned it into a warm and engaging song-and-dance show, and that, thanks chiefly to a delightful score by Arthur Schwartz, the colorfully atmospheric sets of Jo Mielziner, and the characteristic brilliance of Shirley Booth, it should be the town's newest hit.

It is not exactly a secret these days that Miss Booth is one of the wonders of the American stage, a superb actress, a magnificent comedienne, and an all-around performer of seemingly endless versatility. In a pinch, I suppose she could even play Juliet. In the musical comedy version of "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" she has the role of an amiable and available girl, who likes to call her lovers "Harry," and she is very decidedly the life of the party. Despite Miss Smith and George Abbott, the new show has occasional book trouble, particularly in the first act, but Miss Booth makes you forget any such minor weaknesses.

Song and Dance

For some reason or other, I had never suspected that, among Miss Booth's talents, was the ability to put over a song and even go into a dance when necessary. It is quite possible that her voice wouldn't completely satisfy the most austere and academic of music critics, but, give her a good, lively song like Mr. Schwartz's "Look Who's Dancing" or "Love Is the Reason," and she is a delight to all beholders. Furthermore, she can take a line of dialogue that is only passably funny and make it seem like a true masterpiece of hilarity. Combining humorous brilliance with a kind of rich humanity, her performance is a complete joy.

As for Mr. Schwartz, he has written some fine scores in his time, but I think he is at his best in this newest of his works. The two songs I have already mentioned and several others, including "Mine 'Til Monday," "Make the Man Love Me," "I'm Like a New Broom" and the charming "Growing Pains," are particularly attractive numbers, and there is a brightness and gayety, as well as an unashamed tunefulness, about the entire score of "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" that makes it a pleasure to listen to. Dorothy Fields' lyrics are always competent, and the evening is at its happiest when it is raising its voice in song.

The Book

As I have noted, Mr. Mielziner's atmospheric sets of Brooklyn in the early days of the century are colorful, humorous and always a vast help to the proceedings. There isn't a great deal of dancing, but there is a Halloween ballet, staged by Herbert Ross, that is excellent. I have reservations about the book, which struck me as having a bit of trouble getting started, and is rarely of exceptional interest in telling the story of poor, faithful Katie Nolan and husband, Johnny, but the musical numbers atone for its frailties. Anyway, in the second act, even the narrative is satisfactory.

Johnny Johnston, in his first local theatrical role, sings pleasantly as the weak but likeable Johnny Nolan, but I thought that he was slightly colorless in his acting. Marcia Van Dyke, another newcomer, is fresh and charming in a pleasantly Hepburn-esque fashion as the loyal Katie, and I particularly liked Nathaniel Frey as the rather put-upon lover of the lady played by Miss Booth. The agile dancing of Lou Wills Jr. is of assistance from time to time, and it was good to see Harland Dixon, a wonderful dancer from an earlier musical comedy era, appear for a moment or two. "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" is an agreeable show.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
April 20, 1951

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY Jr.

Thanks to Shirley Booth

THERE are two shows within the stage version of "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn," and by far the better one is Shirley Booth singing and carrying on as a somewhat faded good time girl. The other, a watery hymn of failure with musical hope shining through the musical tears, has been plucked by Betty Smith and George Abbott from Miss Smith's successful novel about a Brooklyn childhood. Set to catchy, sentimental music by Arthur Schwartz and street-corner lyrics by Dorothy Fields, there is nothing outstanding in either direction about this half of the act. It is simply a monotonous exposition of a mildly pathetic story, shaded off the stage by the spreading foliage of Miss Booth's grand performance.

* * *

The actress has the role of Cissy, the affectionate aunt who never bothered to marry any except the first of her numerous husbands. Speaking in a thin nasal voice in the accent heard east of the Bridge, Miss Booth combines earthy expressions with the gestures of emphatic refinement in a delightful comedy turn. She is right in there pitching when the orchestra tunes up, too, and her rendition of the sly and swingy ballad "Love Is the Reason for It All" is the most lively musical moment of the production. In tune or in fine sarcastic fettle, Miss Booth gives light and contour to a gloomy, flat piece of work.

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The majority of "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" is concentrated on a story of youthful ambitions fading into drudgery and poverty, with the libretto centering not on the imaginative Francis but on her parents Katie and Johnny Nolan. Playing these parents, Marcia Van Dyke and Johnny Johnston are suitably drab and defeated toward the end, but there is no strong emotional communication established between them in the beginning scenes to give this fall a poignancy. Their vows of love to each other and their musical advice to their child Francie is plaintive and rather vapid. The score, and even the lyrics, seem much better in group chorales like the hock shop song called "Mine 'Til Monday." Despite its musical play form, this is a listless affair except when director Abbot stirs up the whole company or clears the stage for Miss Booth.

* * *

According to the current fashion there is a ballet in the second act, dealing with the Halloween horrors in a wildly athletic fashion. Nathaniel Frey, Nomi Mitty and Dody Heath are prominent in the supporting cast, and Jo Mielziner has designed some sets which reflect the brown color of existence in Brooklyn's less fortunate circumstances. "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" contains a few airs that will probably be whistled along the sidewalks this summer, and it gives Miss Booth the opportunity to strut her homely but hilarious stuff in the musical medium. Otherwise it lacks the purposeful vitality necessary to its musical play form.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

April 20, 1951

Laughter and Tears Mingle in 'A Tree'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Musical.
Topic—Love and Life.
Time—1900s.
I find it—Superb.

Had a lovely, lovely time at the Alvin last night. Wish you were there.

"A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" is unique in what it can do to an audience. Practically all the time, you stifle pleasant, sentimental tears, yet you are constantly laughing. It is a terribly rare combination of heart and craftsmanship and exquisite taste that makes you love being the target of its emotions.

You may remember from the book or the picture that this is a story at the turn of the century about Katie who loved one handsome weakling, and Cissy who loved many ugly strong men. It is the tender account of Katie's struggle to bring up her young daughter, and Cissy's adventures in having a child, and holding a husband who wasn't really a husband at all.

Artful Directing.

This is as artful a job of directing as I ever hope to see in the musical theater, and since George Abbott produced it too, and helped Betty Smith write the book from her novel, it is pretty much his baby. How happy he must be.

The jewel of the evening, as rumor had suggested, is Shirley Booth's miraculous handling of the salty life and loves of Cissy. If you think Miss Booth reached the top of her form in "Come Back, Little Sheba," just wait till you see this. Her songs and dances are captivating, and her jokes are gems. But all of it springs from a real character.

The star could have a dozen encores on "Love." Instead she keeps being Cissy, and the show goes on.

Good Intentions.

Cissy giving birth to a baby already four days old, or Cissy reconnoitering a long and well lost love are incidents to treasure. Cissy singing in a cracked lisp is a joy.

Johnny Johnston is co-starred as the weak husband. The record suggested he was a grinning balladeer, but under Abbott's tutelage he turns out an impressive performance as a fellow who is all intentions and no will. "Growing Pains," sung to his little daughter, is a lovely heart breaker, and the failing conviction of the reprised "New Broom" makes a real character in song.

Lyrical Dancing.

Marcia Van Dyke is cool and earnest and freshly pretty as the disillusioned wife. Her straightforward playing of emotional sequences adds constantly to the show's genuine air.

Dorothy Fields is in her top form as lyricist, which is close to peerless. Arthur Schwartz has dreamed up a sprightly, delicate, atmospheric score, whose catchiest numbers seemed "Mine Till Monday" and "Look Who's Dancing."

The dancing is more often lyrical pantomime of a situation than elaborate stepping, until Halloween and the D.T.s hit the hero in a frantic nightmare. Mostly Herbert Ross has used dance movement to delicately dress up and emphasize the narrative.

Irene Sharaff is always a top favorite of mine as costume designer, and there she stays. It seems habitual to remark that Jo Mielziner has topped himself, but it is usually true. Here the heat and haze have the romantic bittersweet color of everybody's childhood.

I have rarely had more fun laughing, and never had more fun crying. This is an experience of real honesty, taste and ingenuity.

Journal American

April 20, 1951

Musical Disappoints; Lacking in Warmth

By JOHN McCLAIN

It seems to me that George Abbott and Betty Smith and Arthur Schwartz and Dorothy Fields and the other people involved in making a musical comedy out of "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn," which opened at the Alvin Theatre last night, are guilty of dereliction of duty. I don't think they made this exciting property come to life as I had hoped.

Maybe that's unfair. Maybe it's wrong to keep remembering all the engaging moments in the book and to weigh these against what you see on the stage. What if they started from scratch? But on the other hand when you tee off on something as popular as "Tree," you stick your neck out. All the people who read the book expect eminence.

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The Show Fails

Judged on that basis I would say the show fails to purvey the delightful and sympathetic story of the Irish drunk who raises this sprout, Francie, through the inhuman efforts of his hard-working wife.

I never for a moment thought Johnny Johnston was either Irish or alcoholic or particularly fond of his daughter. I didn't even think that his wife, Katie, was reasonably impelled to go through the agony she suffered to keep the home and child intact. I don't blame either Mr. Johnston or Miss Van Dyke (who played Katie) for this omission. I blame the script.

On the plus side there is the incomparable performance of Shirley Booth as Aunt Cissy. While she is aboard, which is almost all the time, there is no concern with what it's all about or why. She simply dominates the proceedings, speaking and singing.

There is another memorable contribution by Nathaniel Frey, who plays the Teela husband of Aunt Cissy. I also thought Nomi Mitty, as Frances, was ingratiating.

• • •

Only Adequate

Musically I would say the show is not more than adequate. There didn't seem to be either a truly distinguished new tune or lyric, although the incidental, smaller numbers were effective. They have a happy rollicking quality which fits the pattern of the proceedings.

There is a ballet, of course, and it is good. Something to do with the story of a drunkard's delusions and frustrations. Good, but by no means great.

I think that if you approach this show without any preconceived ideas, based on your knowledge of "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn," you would find it a mildly pleasant musical.

Otherwise I think you will be disappointed.

"Make a Wish"

New York Herald Tribune

April 19, 1951

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY Jr.

Good Wishes

THE new "Make a Wish" at the Winter Garden is a Left Bank musical with Texas overtones, a loose collection of songs and jests so heartily presented by a good and ebullient cast that it fills its large theater with gayety. Based on Ferenc Molnar's "The Good Fairy," this show has evolved through several doctorings into a series of sketches about four young people and one aging wolf cavorting through pseudo-Parisian adventures ranging from a department store spree to a beaux arts ball. The music by Hugh Martin is brassy, and the performances by Nanette Fabray, Harold Lang, Melville Cooper and Helen Gallagher match it with an energy as unfailing as that of a kid dancing on a street corner for pennies. "Make a Wish" is high spirited trivia deftly arranged into a pleasant musical diversion.

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The book credited to Preston Sturges, with revisions attributed to Abe Burrows, seems to be about almost anything that occurred to mind during an extended out-of-town tour. Basically, it concerns the escapades of an escaped orphan girl cavorting among the festive youth of the Left Bank, but it aims its random darts at various targets, some American, some French and some as international as sex. It has no central satire but contains a lot of good humor as its heroine, in the person of Miss Fabray, hovers between Stephen Douglass as a poor but handsome lawyer and Melville Cooper as a wealthy and susceptible meat packer. A scene between eager senility and baffling innocence in a highly colored Ritz apartment is the funniest book scene in the show, but most of the laughs arise from sharply-delivered gags rather than situations.

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Gower Champion's ballet about a department store sale, with a crafty shoplifter, distraught salesmen and predatory customers, is a piece of hilarious farcical pantomime that tops everything else around it. Collectively, the principals and chorus have been paced across the stage in a lively manner by director John C. Wilson, and a students' ball is a riot of colorful costumes and dancing and singing ensembles. Miss Fabray both sings and acts with a charming enthusiasm, and Douglass pairs off with her in love songs that are melodious but with hardly a trace of the blues. Martin's lyrics are somewhat artificial, but his music swings along in step with a show that never pauses for breath and is out looking for nothing but a good time.

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Harold Lang plays a short and penniless Texan, a chorus boy from the "Folies Labiche" who dances and sings with a boyish vitality in the company of Helen Gallagher as his pertly domineering playmate. They take part in some of the best numbers, including the careless "Who Gives a Sou?" the carefree "Suits Me Fine" and the nasal "Take Me Back to Texas With You." Cooper saunters in and out of the plot with his customary left-handed sophistication, and the cast also includes Mary Finney as a gaunt madam and Phil Leeds as an Academician on a tear. The many sets and costumes by Raoul Pene Du Bois are fine musical comedy caricatures of a famous Paris quarter. "Make a Wish" is touched only once or twice with theatrical magic, but the rest of the time it sparkles brightly enough with the tinsel shine of high quality performance and production.

"MAKE A WISH"

Musical comedy based on "The Good Fairy" by Ferenc Molnar; book by Preston Sturges; music and lyrics by Hugh Martin; staged by John C. Wilson; dances and musical ensembles staged by Gower Champion; settings and costumes by Raoul Pene du Bois; presented by Harry Rigby, Jule Styne and Alexander H. Cohen at the Winter Garden Theatre, April 18, 1951. The cast:

Dr. Didier..... Eda Heinemann
Dr. Francel..... Phil Leeds
Janette..... Nanette Fabray
Ricky..... Harold Lang
Poupette..... Helen Gallagher
Policeman.... Howard Wendell
Marius Frigo.. Melville Cooper
Paul Dumont.. Stephen Douglass
The Madam..... Mary Finney
Felix Labiche... Le Roi Operti
Sales Manager.. Howard Wendell

The New York Times

April 19, 1951

Nanette Fabray Stars in New Musical Comedy, Entitled 'Make a Wish'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Say a word of thanks to Nanette Fabray and the other performers of "Make a Wish," which opened at the Winter Garden last evening. Say a particular word of thanks to Gower Champion, who has designed one of the swiftest satirical ballets we have had in any musical show. For these are the people who have made the most enjoyable contributions to a routine comedy with a grab-bag book and a mediocre score.

Miss Fabray is a radiant young lady with a good voice and an enthusiasm for acting who has long deserved a show of her own. Tearing a leaf or two out of Molnar's "The Good Fairy," Preston Sturges has cast her as a Parisian orphan who blunders into sophisticated life and emerges triumphant.

This makes a pleasant part for Miss Fabray who can clown her way through some grotesque situtions and sing "Who Gives a Sou?" and "Make a Wish," which are the best romantic songs in the show. Thanks to the plot, Harold Lang and Helen Gallagher have ample time to prove themselves the most winning and versatile singing and dancing team at the moment; and Stephen Douglass, a tall baritone who was excellent in "Carousel," sings the role of an indigent Parisian attorney with a rich voice and professional authority.

* * *

Some day some talented American will write a good part for Melville Cooper, the mooning English comic. No one has found much for Mr. Cooper to do in "Make a Wish." But as an aging philanderer, he has drawn quite a lot of funny stuff out of his bag of tricks and gives an impression of acting a humorous role.

Since Raoul Pène du Bois has Gallic blood flowing through his veins, you may expect some gay Parisian scenery, done with the true flair of an artist, and costumes, particularly for the ballets, that are bold and imaginative. For some reason or other, there does seem to be more scenery than show. The performers have to be on their toes to find a way through it.

* * *

Mr. Champion is the only one who really makes use of the production. At the end of the first act, he has composed a spinning beaux arts ball that serves the purpose creditably. But toward the end of the show, he contributes a little gem of ballet cartooning about a department store sale. Now that he and his dancers have accomplished it, this seems to be one of the most inevitable subjects for satiric dancing.

Everyone knows the themes—the frantic search for bargains, the nervous attempts to try on hats, the voracious picking over of the merchandise and the unctuous skill of shop-lifting. Apart from these wry details, which are sketched in with arid mimicry, Mr. Champion has developed the cartoon into a whirling low-comedy conclusion.

* * *

This is the freshest interlude in the production. In fact, it may be the only fresh item "Make a Wish" brings to Broadway. For it is the only time when the performers have something genuine to work with. Since most of the performers are talented, this is a pity. Miss Fabray, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Lang and Miss Gallagher are entitled to a nimbler book than Mr. Sturges has written and less mechanical music than Hugh Martin has extracted from his pianola.

Daily Mirror

April 19, 1951

'Make a Wish' Is Good For a Good Time

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Harry Rigby, Jule Styne and Alexander H. Cohen brought a lively musical called "Make a Wish" to the Winter Garden last evening. The Preston Sturges book is based on Ferenc Molnar's "The Good Fairy." The score is by Hugh Martin. Report has it that the libretto has undergone a number of changes since the show originally preemed in Philadelphia.

Frankly, it could stand more. This story of the little French orphan who runs away to Paris, is befriended by a wolfish meat packer and a couple of American dancers, and finally finds romance with a poor but handsome young lawyer could be more amusing. However, it has the virtue of improving as the proceedings progress.

There is a hilarious take-off on a Parisian's idea of an American bargain sale. There should be more such high jinks. The Martin tunes are pleasant, if not quite up to the standard he set in "Best Foot Forward." You'll be hearing several of them in the bistros and over the air.

Raoul Pene du Bois has designed tasteful, stunning settings and costumes. They alone are almost worth the price of admission. Gower Champion has supplied buoyant choreography, and John C. Wilson has staged the production capably. The cast is first-rate.

Nanette Fabray is delightful as the venturesome orphan. Easy on the eyes, an accomplished dancer and singer, she makes everything she does appealing. Melville Cooper, a wonderful comedian, makes his material seem better than it is. Stephen Douglass is a good-looking and full-voiced young lawyer. Helen Gallagher and Harold Lang are excellent as the Texans touched with nostalgia.

Phil Leeds, Eda Helnemann, Mary Finney, Howard Wendell, Le Roi Operti and the Sylvia Manon Trio are other assets.

If you don't visit the Winter Garden expecting a "South Pacific" or a "Guys and Dolls," the chances are you will have a good time. The first-nighters certainly did, judging by their robust applause. They blistered their palms and taxed their tonsils cheering the new arrival.

Du Bois has really outdone himself with the decor. He is a wizard with a sketching pencil or a paint brush. He has certainly provided sumptuous and evocative backgrounds for as sprightly a troupe of entertainers as you will find on any Broadway stage. From bit player to star, they really enjoyed it.

Though "Make a Wish" is no masterpiece, it has much to recommend it. Miss Fabray is bewitching, and that Cooper chap is marvelous.

New York Post

April 19, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

Speaking Particularly of a Ballet

The trouble with having "Guys and Dolls" and "The King and I" in one season is that it tends to spoil one for other musical shows. Here is "Make a Wish," which opened at the Winter Garden last night, a quite pleasant girl-and-music concoction, with such attractive performers as Nanette Fabray, Melville Cooper, Helen Gallagher and Harold Lang, a handsome and lavish production, a general air of liveliness, and a really brilliant and original comic ballet, and yet, somehow, it struck me as being, on the whole, curiously commonplace. There is certainly nothing painful about it, but it just isn't very exciting.

To get down to its peak achievement at once, the ballet, delightfully staged by Gower Champion, is nothing short of wonderful. It is an enchantingly ferocious number, all about a sale in a Paris department store that turns into a devastating riot, and it succeeds in being at the same time funny and fresh. Although I do not claim to be an expert on the art of the ballet, it seems to me by all odds the most hilarious one I have seen since the Keystone Kops number in "High Button Shoes" and the most imaginative since the "Uncle Tom's Cabin" episode in "The King and I."

The Orphan

It is not being too hard on the new show to say that the rest of the evening isn't up to the standard set by its high point. "Make a Wish" is based on a play by Ferenc Molnar called "The Good Fairy," which once starred Helen Hayes and the late Walter Connolly. It wasn't one of Mr. Molnar's major achievements, and now, although the eminent moviemaker, Preston Sturges, made the adaptation and the brilliant Abe Burrows is said to have worked on it manfully, its story of the girl fugitive from a French orphanage, who helps the career of her penniless sweetheart by flirting with a millionaire, still isn't a triumph.

It certainly isn't the fault of the players. Miss Fabray, a gay and winning young musical comedy performer, brings all of her engaging zest and skillfulness to

the role of the orphan. Melville Cooper, an enormously talented comedian, works valiantly with the less than prodigiously humorous role of the amorous millionaire who turns out not to be especially amorous after all. Despite all of their admirable efforts, and some occasionally agreeable comic moments, the story rarely comes to life in the fashion we have been led to expect of our musical shows in these exacting days.

Helen Gallagher

There are other likeable performers. Helen Gallagher, an attractive young dancer, who has brightened every musical comedy or revue in which I have seen her, is of particular help as the heroine's friend. One of the best male dancers in the theater, as everyone knows by now, is Harold Lang, and he, too, is of great assistance to the proceedings in the role of a short Texan. I thought they were especially good in a number known as "That Face!" Stephen Douglass, who made a fine impression in the last engagement in these parts of "Carousel," is entirely satisfactory as the hero.

While Hugh Martin's music seemed to me pleasant, and I liked a song called "Who Gives a Sou?" it was my impression last night that his score was a little too frequently on the verge of being reminiscent. Raoul Pene du Bois has contributed sets and costumes that are always vivid and attractive. The comic ballet about the sale is, of course, Gower Champion's particular triumph as a dance director, but his other numbers are likewise first-rate. Indeed, although "Make a Wish" is a rather agreeable show, it achieves brilliance only when Mr. Champion starts dancing.

Journal American

April 19, 1951

Fine Ballet and Music Offset a Dull Story

By JOHN McCLAIN

The new musical comedy, "Make a Wish," which opened at the Winter Garden last night, is just about the most insipid and pedestrian story ever told, but it is done with such verve and enthusiasm, the music is so sprightly, the ballets so exciting, the settings so gay, that pretty soon you don't care what it's about. You just like it. I think, therefore, that it will be a hit.

The program says it's based on "The Good Fairy," by Ferenc Molnar, and Preston Sturges is credited with writing the book. Their joint contribution is, in my estimation, barely adequate.

I give the great kudos to Gower Champion, who must have been responsible for two of the best ballets I have ever seen, and to John C. Wilson, who kept the proceedings moving at a pace that never lets you stop to catch your breath.

Boy Meets Girl

The actual story involved is as old as musical comedy. Nanette Fabray, the heroine, escapes from a Paris school for orphans and in her quest for freedom and excitement runs across Melville Cooper, one of the richest men in France.

Shortly thereafter she meets and falls in love with Stephen Douglass, an impoverished lawyer. I scarcely need to tell you she gets Cooper to employ Douglass, or that this effort on her part is misconstrued by Douglass to the extent of furnishing a first act curtain.

* * *

There is a minor plot involving two highly commendable characters named Helen Gallagher and Harold Lang, a Parisian demi-monde and her boy friend from Texas.

None of these ingredients, as mentioned, are going to fracture any audience but the fact is they are so skillfully dished up that they do. I may be wrong, but I don't think there's one great pop tune in the score. Yet each number is rendered with such steam, and timing, and with such strenuous aid from the pit band, that you're captivated.

* * *

Truly Exciting

And I repeat that the ballet, "Students Ball," in the first act, is one of the truly exciting interludes in this season's theatre. But it is topped half an hour later by another one called "The Sale." I will say without qualification that this is alone worth the price of admission.

All the people in the show look good and they behave as though they like what they're doing. The costumes and settings by Raoul Pene du Bois aid immeasurably and I believe the music and lyrics by Hugh Martin, especially the score incidental to the two ballets, are first class.

DAILY NEWS

April 19, 1951

'Make a Wish' Offers Bouncy Songs And Several Fine Dance Numbers

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Make a Wish," the handsome and pleasant new musical at the Winter Garden, is at its best when it is dancing or when it is making a choral number out of one of Hugh Martin's bouncy songs—or when Melville Cooper is impersonating a Parisian roue in an elaborately sinful effort to destroy the virtue of the heroine, Nanette Fabray. When the show gets into its plot, which is based on Ferenc Molnar's little comedy, "The Good Fairy," it is at its second-best, for this is an elaborate and coy plot about a girl who escapes from an orphanage and goes on the town in Paree.

Bargain Rush Ballet.

When "The Good Fairy" was produced here in 1931 with Helen Hayes as the orphan I thought it was a simple little comedy, but it didn't seem so simple at last evening's premiere of "Make a Wish." It got in the way of some very attractive dancers and singers and it interrupted the tunes. I wanted more of Hugh Lang and Helen Gallagher dancing—a happy, light-footed couple who have something of Fred and Adele Astaire about them, and I could have heard more of such infectiously rhythmic numbers as "Who Gives a Sou" and "Paris, France."

And I could see Gower Champion's two ballets, "Students' Ball" and "The Sale," several times in one evening. The latter ballet, showing a bargain rush in a big department store, is very smart and funny, and the music for this number, written by Richard Pribor, is admirable.

Miss Fabray, one of the most attractive music-show heroines, is fine when she is permitted to cut loose. Her best big scene is her first, in which, as a bewildered orphan on the lam in Paris, she gets mixed into the chorus of a saucy night club and is instructed in the art of the time-step.

Gower Champion, as any TV watcher knows, is a dance designer of nimble wit, and the numbers he has devised for "Make a Wish" are top-grade—and the boys and girls who dance them are top-grade, too. Raoul Pene du Bois has provided some nice sets and costumes, and the principal entertainers include Stephen Douglass, Eda Heinemann, Phil Leeds and—in a tasteless and useless part—Mary Finney. Best of the bunch is Mr. Cooper, a really skilled musicomedian.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

April 19, 1951

'Make a Wish' Made By Nanette Fabray

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Musical.
Setting—Paris.
I find it—Pleasant.

The high points of "Make a Wish" are conspicuous enough to make you restless at the transitions. When the material is worthy of them, the valiant players spread joy all over the place.

These performers are the first to sense the show's occasional flat places. Then they work like beavers, and their eagerness gets more important than what they are saying or doing.

The show is based on an old Molnar play about an orphan trying to be sophisticated. Through various adventures she falls in love with a penniless lawyer, gets him a fabulous account, then finally wins him.

Delightful Nanette.

The show seems thin because this perfectly presentable story is written and directed so that no element in it ever seems real. Consequently the musical numbers are like separate vaudeville turns. If you accept them as such, you have a much better time than you can searching for logic and reason.

The first killer of the evening is an elaborate Parisian revue number in which the star, Nanette Fabray, plays an unrehearsed chorus dolly, who never catches up with the line.

The item is grandly costumed and staged, and Miss Fabray plays it deliciously. Her confusion, sandwiched with winsome and gawky enthusiasm, is a momentous experience.

Comedy by Cooper.

There is, later on, an exhilarating and ingenious ballet depicting the ruin of a department store during a sale. Here the customers test the goods, toss it around and take it or steal it, all in a sprightly comic spirit. The number grows in vigor and humor until the store is stripped even of its dummies and counters.

Toward the middle of the second act, Melville Cooper, previously in and out of proceedings, takes over for a couple of scenes that are the show's most substantial comedy. Good-natured gags have peppered the story till then. But when Cooper organizes his seduction of the heroine in an emerald hotel suite, there is a shine on the show it rarely has otherwise.

There are some really lovely sets, which originally appear through a gigantic Venetian blind. And there are some riotously brilliant costumes, all the work of Raoul Pene DuBois. Along with Gower Champion, who has patterned the dances, he turns out to be something of a hero of the evening.

Must Work or Else.

Nanette Fabray lends her impish good spirits, and both her dancing and singing ability, with generosity to the whole evening. My wish would be that as an innocent orphan on a spree, she was not left so often by her material in a position where she has to exert powerful authority, or see the show drop out from under her.

Harold Lang sings and of course dances with a saucy style lightly his own, and Helen Gallagher reveals a flair for comicry and musical comedy trouping not previously more than hinted.

Mr. Cooper is Mr. Cooper, which is all to everybody's good. Here is no "South Pacific" or "Guys and Dolls." It is just a good old-fashioned mixture of music hall stuff, basted with a story idea. If your attention wanders, let it, and it will shortly be drawn back to the stage with renewed and relaxed pleasure.

"Angels Kiss Me"

DAILY NEWS

April 18, 1951

'Angels Kiss Me' a Sorry Drama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In "Angels Kiss Me," which opened last evening at the National Theatre, an extrovert boy marries a manic-depressive girl and it drives the boy almost out of his mind. Not quite out of his mind, though, for this boy is made of strong stuff. He is a newspaper distributor, and when you run across an extrovert newspaper distributor—which is practically all the time—you had better holler uncle.

This play, by Scott Michel, is an earnest play and an honest one and therefore is not to be dismissed earlier than Saturday. It also is a bad play, quite badly acted. In the dark of the National last evening I wrote on my program some notes, just to be sure I could quote them accurately afterward. Now, afterward, I look at these notes and wonder if I wrote down what I heard or if I heard what I wrote down.

Some Direct Quotes.

For instance, according to a memorandum, somebody says, "Michael is so strong and she has a private tutor." I forgot to write down who said it, so all by itself like this the line doesn't seem to make much sense. Again, I thought I heard somebody say, "She excites me as much as any woman has." But whoever said it didn't say how much much was, so I lost interest. And one of the big lines is, "If you have any real affection for her, let her go." Well, maybe this is good advice if one is an extrovert wholesaler of newspapers and the object of real affection is a female with a tendency toward drowning herself in a lake.

To complete this report, which will be distributed by distributors of this newspaper from here to Honolulu, the boy is played by Alan Manson. (He is Michael, who is so strong.) The girl is played by Maryanna Gare. (She is from a social family which is wealthy and is the one who has a private tutor. But she is a manic-depressive, which is something no newspaper circulation man can stand.)

Or no newspaper drama critic, either.

The two sets are by Frederick Fox. The other members of the cast are Dwight Foster, Allan Stevenson, Mary Best, Madeleine Clive and Calvin Thomas. The man who directed "Angels Kiss Me" is Ramsey Burch. The producer is Trudi Michel, who is the sister of the author, Scott Michel.

"ANGELS KISS ME"

Play by Scott Michel; staged by Ramsey Burch; settings by Frederick Fox; costumes by Kenn Barr; presented by Trudi Michel at the National Theatre, April 17, 1951. The cast:

Jimmy.....Dwight Foster
Charlie Corwin..Allan Stevenson
Michael Bancroft..Alan Manson
Helen Darcy.....Mary Best
Katherine Hobald.....
Madeleine Clive
Myra Winters..Maryanna Gare
Franklyn Winters.....
Calvin Thomas

Synopsis: Act I, Living room of Mike Bancroft's penthouse in New York, a February night. Act II, The same. An afternoon three months later. Act III, Living room and porch of Franklyn Winters' home, a month later, early evening.

The New York Times

April 18, 1951

Don't Marry a Nut

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Close students of the drama, weighing the art of the season, agree that neither "Springtime Folly" nor "Four Twelves Are 48" had the class of "Angels Kiss Me." "Springtime Folly" was the worst play of the season. "Four Twelves Are 48" ranked just above it—just barely above it.

Scott Michel's "Angels Kiss Me," which occurred at the National last evening, is distinguished from the other two by the fact that it is a serious play. Does this mean that it has a richer intellectual content? Not necessarily. It proves that a man makes a mistake if he marries an insane girl. That is a point which is well taken by nearly everyone, although it is not a contribution to knowledge.

* * *

Mr. Michel's contribution is moral, and this is the quality that puts "Angels Kiss Me" perceptibly ahead of "Springtime Folly" and "Four Twelves Are 48." Mr. Michel shows that a man who marries an insane girl strengthens and refines his own character. His hero is a selfish, ruthless racketeer in the first act, but he is a true gentleman at the end.

Although this is an idea that one should not cynically reject, Mr. Michel's characters are crude and mechanical and his play is uniformly dull. Mr. Michel should seriously ask himself whether the theatre is his natural medium.

* * *

Under Ramsey Burch's direction, the performance is one of the most inept of the season. As the hero, Alan Manson is forthright and attractive, and is ready for a part in a good play. And, of course, Calvin Thomas is always a pleasant actor to see, no matter how lugubrious the exterior circumstances. But the rest of the acting is painfully awkward. Even Frederick Fox's sleek pent-house scenes for the first two acts do not compensate for the mugging. Close students of the drama think that "Four Twelves Are 48" was better acted, although this sort of criticism is getting down to points too fine for practical distinctions. All that matters is that "Springtime Folly," "Four Twelves Are 48" and "Angels Kiss Me" are the low points of the season.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

April 18, 1951

Plots Overflow 'Angels Kiss Me'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type: Drama.
Topic: Insanity.
I find it: Unimpressive.

For a remarkably thin play, "Angels Kiss Me" has an unusual number of themes.

The title refers to the belief of the central character in his own good luck. He is a self-made man, of the tough, driving sort, who thinks he is always right and will always win. He wants a wife with "class," mainly for breeding purposes. When he gets one she turns out to be classy, but also a trifle rocky in the beezer.

There is then this secondary theme of just how far gone mentally this girl is, and what the chances are of her being cured.

Mystery Ending.

There is also a story line, more or less hinted at, which involves the aunt of the girl. She was once turned down by the girl's father, and it is never quite clear just how strongly she has figured in bringing on the girl's lack of balance.

This would seem to be story enough for innumerable plays. It turns out not to be, chiefly because the characters are automatons which exist for plot purposes rather than any character of their own.

In a sense the play falls into the mystery class, since what happened to the girl's mother is not explained until the very end. It has even more than the usual weakness of that type of play, because none of the important narrative points are really clear.

Handsome Production.

The play has been given a handsome if nonluxurious production, and it is acted with a good deal of earnestness by a generally undistinguished cast.

In the central role of the self-made man, who incidentally has a flourishing business distributing newspapers, Alan Manson gives a sharp and determined performance that deserves commendation. He is strictly in character every moment, and gives the play believability that is not supported by the other performances.

Madeleine Clive is handsome as the selfish aunt and Maryanna Gare does her best not to seem too posey and artificial as the young wife.

Daily Mirror

April 18, 1951

Brevity Is Best Part Of 'Angels Kiss Me'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Trudi Michel brought a little number by Scott Michel to the National Theatre last evening called "Angels Kiss Me." Well, they slugged us. We had already given the Coleman Award for the Worst Play of the Season to another little number called "Springtime Folly," but we were compelled to snatch it back and bestow it upon the new arrival.

As to just what this horrendous melodrama is all about, we aren't sure. But it seemed to us that it had something or other to do with a lucky newsboy who became a lucky gambler. This gamin, falling in love with a debutante, decided to marry her. Everyone was against him: her wealthy papa, her snooty aunt, his former girl friend and a crap-shooting crony.

So the villainous aunt tried to convince him that his wife was a cuckoo, that their child would be a mongoloid idiot or worse, that he had better pull out while the pulling was still good. But he hadn't built up a news distribution agency the hard way for nothing. He hadn't learned what a crooked pair of dice looked like for nothing.

He saw through the scheming aunt's plot to cheat him out of happiness and a flossy marriage. He told the harridan off, and by the time the final curtain fell you knew that everything was going to be okay so far as he was concerned. He was going to be the proud papa of a normal child. He was going to be the same old happy-go-lucky guy. Angels were still going to be kissing him.

During an intermission, in the lobby, we overheard a first-nighter say, "My nephew used to write a play like this every week. And, worse yet, he made me listen to them all!" Well, as father said, in "Life With Father," "Oh, Gad!"

Our sympathies today go out to Alan Manson, Madeleine Clive, Maryanna Gare, Mary Best, Calvin Thomas, Dwight Foster and Allan Stevenson, who were involved in this macabre event. All we can say in their behalf is that they were valiant under fire. They eminently deserve citations for courage.

"Angels Kiss Me" is one of those unfortunate little affairs that is a synopsis rather than a play. The curtain went up about 8:25 and came down at 10:15. It was merciful in its brevity. Perhaps we were lucky in that the author was content to underdevelop his idea. At least the punishment was short and to the point.

One Ramsey Burch is credited with the direction, such as it is. And Frederick Fox is tabbed as the scenic designer. Freddy is an amazing fellow. He has done some wonderful backgrounds in the past for plays on expansive budgets. In this instance, he has made the most of an apparently limited bankroll. Ditto Kenn Barr on the costumes.

Anyway, things were pretty rough at the National last evening.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

April 18, 1951

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

Not Too Exciting

A HAZE of uncertain performance and direction hangs over the new psychological drama at the National, obscuring whatever excitement or meaning it may have to offer. "Angels Kiss Me," by Scott Michel, concerns itself with an eerie romance between a tough, self-made newspaper distributor and the mentally unbalanced daughter of a first family, presented in what appears to be a slick and shallow context. The play is further handicapped by the fact that it has been poorly executed and is observed only through a peephole provided by the smooth acting of Alan Manson in the leading role. For this reason it may not be entirely the fault of its author that its clinical and emotional complications seem more like pulp fiction than living theater.

* * *

The playwright's story progresses with a perilously easy logic, fueled by the ambitions of an ex-street arab who has fought his way to the top and wants the final fillip of social distinction for himself and his unborn children. With this end in view he elopes with a young tobacco heiress against the wishes of her formidable aunt. The rest is a steady succession of revealed family secrets and hidden animosities, with the better nature cropping out when it should and villainy unmasked in a contrived cliff-hanging denouement. Within all of this, some of Michel's writing has a colloquial sparkle and even an intermittent force which Manson's performance displays to good advantage. Others among the characters are wooden, though, most of the situations are thin, argumentative pretexts of real conflicts.

Manson creates several convincing interludes with his portrayal of a rough-and-ready hustler facing an odd dilemma with a dogged reliance on his luck and a certain instinctive courage. The rest of the acting is of the sort that imitates acting rather than reality, and the direction is little more than adequate to the needs of exits and entrances. Frederick Fox has designed a pair of sets representing a pent house and a country home for this Trudi Michel production. "Angels Kiss Me" shows a few flashes of ability on the part of its author, but it would need more than a little improvement to get by in this version.

Journal American

April 18, 1951

A Confusing Play, Needlessly Involved

By JOHN McCLAIN

Something called "Angels Kiss Me," a new play by Scott Michel, was unfurled last evening at the National Theatre and I do not think it will be a success. I'll tell you why.

First of all, it is a most confusing idea about almost nothing. A hoodlum ingratiates himself with the daughter of a respectable family, but there are many reasons why this union is impracticable.

One of these reasons is that the daughter is slightly whacky. She walks about at strange moments making implausible statements, and otherwise bewildering all. Me, included.

ENOUGH TROUBLE.

Secondly, there is the reason that you don't want any play of this type to become so complicated, plot-wise, that you are at a loss to dissect it. We have enough trouble.

I thought Alan Manson was very good as Mike Bancroft, the guy, and I liked particularly Madeleine Clive and Maryanna Gare in the supporting parts. That sounds perfunctory, but I mean it.

Looking back on the whole thing, I would say that Mr. Michel, the author, had a good basic idea: The gangster and the girl. But then I thought he became needlessly involved.

Everybody got neurotic—and that's where I quit!

New York Post

April 18, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Man Who Married a Mad Wife

A grim and earnest theme doesn't necessarily mean a good drama. This, I should think, was fairly obvious, and wouldn't have to be reiterated in a sermon on the theater. Apparently, however, there are playwrights, producers and even backers who don't accept any such melancholy fact and feel that if a play is harrowing enough it must be pretty good. At least, on no other assumption is it easy to see why so lugubrious a work as Scott Michel's "Angels Kiss Me," which opened at the National last night, should have received a Broadway production.

Heaven knows, it is grim enough. For "Angels Kiss Me" is all about an ambitious and determined young man, who, having risen from the bottom to a high position in the newspaper distribution business, wants to marry a society girl and wins one who is insane, with suicidal inclinations. Her mother, it seems, had drowned herself in a fit of insanity, and the young woman is likewise tempted from time to time to jump in a nearby lake.

Ominous Aunt

There are other complications. The young man, for example, is anxious to have a son, even after he finds out the truth about his wife, and he is so convinced of his own destiny that he is sure everything will turn out all right, even though the evidence is considerably against him. Furthermore, there is a sinister aunt hovering about, who seems to devote most of her time to seeing that her niece doesn't get cured. It appears that the aunt is suffering from frustration, or something.

There is one not inconsiderable virtue in "Angels Kiss Me." It is mercifully short. Outside of that, and workmanlike performances by Alan Manson and Calvin Thomas, there is nothing that I can think of to say on behalf of Mr. Michel's play. On one or two occasions, it struck me that the dramatist was going in for some fairly fancy writing, but it can hardly be added that this is of any help to the play. It is all pretty dreary.

Mishap

This is certainly not to deny Mr. Michel's earnestness. He is deadly serious about his play, and he tries to be very tense and dramatic in his story-telling, with emphasis on suspense. The result is that his narrative is believable enough to be a little painful but not skillful enough to be interesting. "Angels Kiss Me" isn't a disaster in the same league with the notorious "Springtime Folly," but, in its own way, it is quite a mishap.

As I have said, Mr. Manson, who plays the man who marries the mad wife, shows himself to be a competent actor, and the reliable Calvin Thomas is of considerable help as the ailing girl's father. Allan Stevenson, who played Lee Tracy's role in the recent Equity Library Theater revival of "Broadway," is of assistance in a minor role. I didn't think that the actresses in the play exactly covered themselves with glory. It is difficult to blame them.

"Night Music"

Journal American

April 9, 1951

An Implausible Play But a Fine Production

By JOHN McCLAIN

The ANTA play series marched on last night at their Playhouse with Robert Whitehead presenting the Equity Library Theatre production of "Night Music," a play by Clifford Odets which was first displayed on Broadway in 1940 with a notable cast and a singular lack of success.

This revival deserves plaudits for several promising performances, for the ingeniously basic lights and sets and a general atmosphere of youth and enthusiasm. But I'm afraid I agree with the original opinion that it just isn't a good play.

The theme, I gather, concerns the problems confronting a young man suffering from a sense of inferiority, or insecurity. In "Night Music" it has the effect of making Leonard Barry, who plays the hero, emerge as one of the most truculent and altogether impossible characters yet devised.

He snarls and picks fights with the most innocent bystander and habitually insults those who seek to help him.

* * *

He avowedly would like to massacre Bette Grayson, the beautiful young girl whose heart is almost instantly won by his violent bad manners, and as for Rod Steiger, the lovable old detective who follows him through the proceedings like a seeing-eye dog, well—he deserves a good punch in the nose for not minding his own business.

This grotesque behavior on the part of the hero is of course the product of his own underprivileged background. And, according to Mr. Odets, there are lots of people around like beautiful Miss Grayson and lovable Mr. Steiger who not only understand but find it all extremely attractive.

That's where he lost me. It has been my unhappy experience to discover that if you habitually berate a young lady and tell her to get out of your life she will finally do so, not pausing to reflect that it is only your sad insecurity speaking. And if you push detectives around, however infirm and lovable, they will belt you over the beezer and lock you up. To hell with what motivated your rash action.

* * *

Despite the fact that I never for a minute believed in either the hero or heroine or the detective or her father or about half the other people involved, I do give credit to these same performers for making heroic efforts within the limits of their lines.

Miss Grayson, who has been away from the theatre for six years, is extremely decorative and proficient; Mr. Barry remains consistently volatile and unattractive throughout and Mr. Steiger gives a convincing imitation of Lee Cobb as the sympathetic sleuth. There are excellent smaller contributions by Michael Lewin, Joe Balfior, Herbert Gottlieb and almost everybody else in the ample cast.

One must praise the selfless effort of these youngsters and the courage and initiative of those who brought the package to Broadway. I think they all deserve a new vehicle—more plausible, please.

"NIGHT MUSIC"

Play by Clifford Odets; staged by Peter Kass; settings by Richard Burns; costumes by Ruth Morley; an Equity Library Theatre production revived by Robert Whitehead under the auspices of the American National Theatre and Academy at the ANTA Playhouse, April 8, 1951. The cast:

Lieutenant	Mark Allen
Murph	Paul Lambert
Steve Takis	Leonard Barry
A. L. Rosenberger	Rod Steiger
Fay Tucker	Bette Grayson
Stagehand	Paul Lambert
Beggar	Michael V. Gazzo
A Girl	Mildred Slavin
Gus	Clarke Gordon
Sailor	Joe Sargent
Mr. George	Sidney Shertzer
Teddy	Vincent Beck
Marty	Stefan Gierasch
Dot	Nance Robbins
Mr. Nichols	Joe Balfior
Lily	Joyce Barnett
Sleeping Man	Michael V. Gazzo
Roy	Herbert Gottlieb
Little Man	Martin Greene
Al	Michael Lewin
Mr. Tucker	Hal Currier
Arnold	Walter Landa
Blind Man	Joe Balfior

New York Post

April 9, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

Revival of a Clifford Odets Play

"Night Music" never was one of my favorite Clifford Odets plays, but there are some wonderful and characteristic things in it, and no one could doubt that it is the work of a man with a tremendous talent for the theater. There is an odd suggestion of Saroyan about it from time to time, but the marks of its author are upon it strongly, which means that it has eloquence, force, a stinging sharpness, a notable gift for characterization, a kind of sullen pity, and a deep understanding of the misfits of the world. It is certainly not a play that can be easily ignored.

Its chief weakness, now that its original text seems to have been pared a bit, lies in the nature of its central character. Mr. Odets clearly meant to show that his hero's nasty disposition and gross ingratitude were merely the pathetic defensiveness of a deeply bruised young man, but it is my impression that what chiefly emerges is his savage unpleasantness. When the sympathetic and fatherly detective of the play says of him that he has "the temper of an alligator with half its charm," I suspect that he is describing him all too accurately.

The Characters

The other people of "Night Music" are infinitely more engaging and far more satisfying. The philosophical detective, with his love for New York and his compassion for people, who presides over the angry romance between the lonely and astonishingly patient heroine and the violent young man, is one of Mr. Odets' happiest creations. And there are some completely delightful incidental characters, including a furtive fur salesman, a song writer who is convinced that his ideas are always being stolen, a hotel clerk who had been a big league baseball player, and the talkative husband of a fortune-teller, that would brighten any play.

When "Night Music" was first produced in 1940, Elia Kazan played the disagreeable hero, Jane Wyatt was the long-suffering heroine, and Morris Carnovsky the philosophical plain-clothes man. The current production, which Robert Whitehead and the American National Theater and Academy offered at the ANTA Playhouse last night, is the work of the Equity Library Theater, and the players are not as celebrated as the members of the original cast. But Leonard Barry, Bette Grayson, and Rod Steiger, who now have the leading roles, are as satisfactory as their predecessors.

The Revival

Indeed, unless my memory is deceiving me, the current revival is a bit sprightlier and less heavy than the 1940 production. Anyway, the quality of the work comes across faithfully, and it is clear that we are in the presence of a playwright of rare and individual talent. I am inclined to think that "Night Music" is better in its parts than it is as a whole. The incidental characters, the assorted episodes of New York at night, the mellow and rueful tone poem of a great city after hours—these are more interesting than the central story.

On the whole, I think I enjoyed this play of 11 years ago more last night than I did when I first saw it. It seemed more garrulous and repetitious then. And even Mr. Kazan's enormous skill and vigor as an actor couldn't make its hero's heart of gold apparent beneath his forbidding exterior. As I have said, "Night Music" isn't to my mind one of Mr. Odets' best plays. But there is so much that is touching and funny and vivid and tumultuous about it that it continues to possess a flaming vitality that should make it clear to anyone why Clifford Odets is a figure of such importance in the American theater.

The New York Times

April 9, 1951

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

If Clifford Odets were an unknown author, it would be easy to characterize "Night Music," which was revived at the Anta Playhouse last evening. Anyone would recognize it as the work of a promising artist. It is clever. It has a nice gift for improvisation. But there is nothing much in it except style.

Even in 1940, when "Night Music" was first produced by the Group Theatre, it looked like the minor work of a major theatre talent. That was the Saroyan era when people were writing by ear in a mood of romantic ruefulness. Mr. Odets already had some thoughtful work to his credit, such as "Awake and Sing" and "Golden Boy." But he took a little time off to write an impudent caprice about a boy and a girl struggling with the monumental indifference of New York City.

* * *

It is hard to understand how the girl comes to fall in love with the boy. In fact, it is impossible. For he is abusive, hostile, vindictive, noisy, braggart, ineffectual and egotistical. He is something to be avoided, like a plague. But under the peculiar influences of 1940, Mr. Odets regarded him as irresistibly romantic, if not rather poetic. In theatrical parlance, that was known as "playing against it."

In all candor, "Night Music" was not much of a play in 1940, and it is even less today. But the dialogue has a good deal of the bitter sweet tautness and brilliance of one of the most gifted theatre writers in this generation. This is the most superficial drama Mr. Odets ever wrote, getting from one point to the next on glibness alone. The glibness, however, contains a lot of genuine writing.

This is an Equity Library Theatre production taken over by Anta as one of the current series. The ten episodic scenes have been graphically designed by Richard Burns, who has made a few quick sketches and a lot of beautiful, moody lighting do the work of heavy scene construction. Starve a good designer and you are likely to get some imaginative work out of him.

Under Peter Kass' direction the performance is brisk and fluent. Bette Grayson, who is Mrs. Odets when she goes home from the theatre, plays the part of the desperate girl agreeably. Lovely and gentle, she catches the romantic sadness of the part, and needs nothing except a little more force to make it count theatrically.

If you saw the original production, you will find yourself looking through Leonard Barry's acting to memories of Elia Kazan's wild dynamism as the boy; and you will also look through Rod Steiger's relaxed acting of the fatherly detective to memories of Morris Carnovsky's warm and capacious acting of eleven years ago. Mr. Barry and Mr. Steiger are interesting actors, but they are haunted by their highly individualistic predecessors. In the comic part of a frustrated song-writer, Michael Lewin gives an amusingly casual performance.

* * *

Since Mr. Odets was in a prodigal frame of mind in 1940, the cast is a long one, full of bits and quips. It gives a lot of young people a chance to walk around a stage and stretch their lungs. As things go in the theatre, this performs a humanitarian service for a densely populated profession in which most actors seldom get behind the footlights. Everyone has a good time except the audience. The most interesting thing about "Night Music" is the contrast between the self-conscious playwright of 1940 and the mature dramatist who wrote "The Country Girl" a decade later. That decade was the most painful and the most profitable in Mr. Odets' career.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

April 9, 1951

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

In a Minor Key

THE Equity Library Theater production of Clifford Odets's "Night Music" has become a part of this season's ANTA Play Series, in a revival having some of the advantages and disadvantages of experimental production. The play is an imaginative one, a semi-poetic mood piece about American city life in 1940 as seen from the under side by a friendless and penniless young visitor. Its poignant imagery is mixed with specious sarcasm; and to this rough edge is fitted another by a cast of uneven ability. Some of this "Night Music" is interesting unconventional theater, flavored with a rueful humor; but, as done here, it is not, on the whole, convincing.

* * *

Odets's central figure is a drifter, a symbol of any young man having a tough time just before America entered the war. His villains are disease, poverty and ignorance; and they are not so much present as represented in the attitudes of the passers-by in various New York settings. With the aid of a girl also trying to find her way through a complicated world, and a sad and kindly police detective, the young man is gradually led to realize that he must try to make things better, not fight others as unfortunate as himself. Some of the writing has so much more breadth and strength than the characters conceived by the playwright that it seems almost as if his indignation had run away with his craftsmanship. It is as though Odets, impatient to let his people speak for themselves, were injuring his illusion by running onto the stage and speaking in support of his argument.

* * *

First presented here ten years ago, "Night Music" has been brought back as a vehicle for the display of various new talents under the auspices of EL/T. Its most striking production feature is the set by Richard Burns, a background skeleton design suggesting the shape of New York, before which the scene of the action is moved with simple objects back and forth between a police station, a stage door, hotel rooms and lobby, Central Park and the World's Fair. It has a simplicity which serves the purpose of a play teeming with people and ideas. The direction, like the acting, is not always as acute as might be wished, particularly in one hotel sequence using more exit doors than appear absolutely necessary or reasonable.

* * *

In the leading role of the young man taking his hard luck out on those who befriend him, Leonard Barry gives a solid and aggressive performance that comes close to satisfying the demands of the material. Mark Allen gets some of the good out of his part of a weary, dying and philosophical policeman, and Michael Lewin does a fine comedy bit late in the show. The many other small and large parts are acted on levels ranging from the competent to the amateurish. There is linguistic color and emotional force lurking in "Night Music," but it is difficult to experiment with. At the ANTA Playhouse it is only partially alive, under something less than the best of circumstances.

DAILY NEWS

April 9, 1951

A Little 'Night Music' Goes a Long Way in ANTA's Odets Revival

By DOUGLAS WATT

Eleven years ago, possessed by an affection for New York and for its young and helpless lovers, Clifford Odets wrote a sentimental and occasionally humorous play called "Night Music." Recently, the Equity Library Theatre did it up again for its off-Broadway following. Last night, the American National Theatre and Academy offered this particular production, with a couple of minor cast changes, at the ANTA Playhouse, where it will remain for two weeks.

More of a vagabond mood than a play, "Night Music" follows the strident adventures of an errand boy who is sent here from Hollywood by a movie company to pick up and bring back two special monkeys. He meets a forlorn young actress and a benevolent detective, who is to be retired the following day. The detective guides a stormy and reluctant romance over a night and a morning of difficulties, and, at the end, the lovers march bravely into the city.

Some Good Lines.

It is an absurd poem, of course, but there are scenes and lines that strike fire and in which the playwright's poignant mood transcends the foolish tale he has woven out of it. There is, for example, a funny and touching bit between the boy and girl in adjoining rooms in a cheap hotel. And there is a good comic character in a skeptical cigar clerk who comments on the passing scene.

Unfortunately, the present production is no better than an average college revival. The players are professionals and, for the most part, far beyond school age, but they are not very adept in their trade. In the role of Steve Takis, the errand boy, Leonard Barry was appealing and fairly convincing, and the part of the cigar clerk was admirably handled by Michael Lewin, but most of the others were exceedingly amateurish.

Bette Grayson made an attractive heroine but her acting style was too muted and commonplace to be of much help. The direction, by Peter Kass, was merely serviceable. A sketchy setting by Richard Burns furnished the background for all the scenes, only prop changes being required.

New York, like Mr. Odets' mind, is a place where anything can happen. Both the city and the man have been productive of more interesting stories than "Night Music."